

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 TRSE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CU-02
/072 W

-----251659Z 039654 /47

R 251504Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3144
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PLAB, FR
SUBJECT: MAY 24 NATIONAL STRIKE

REF: PARIS 14358

1. SUMMARY: FRANCE WAS DISRUPTED BUT NOT PARALYZED BY THE MAY 24 STRIKE CALLED BY ALL THE MAJOR UNIONS. THE CGT-CFDT-FEN ALLIANCE IN SUPPORT OF THE UNION OF THE LEFT IS NOW PRESSING FOR FURTHER LABOR UNITY, AND HINTING OF FURTHER ACTION TO COME. FOR ITS PART, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS UNIMPRESSED. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MAY 24, ALL THE MAJOR UNIONS IN FRANCE PARTICIPATED IN A STRIKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES (SEE REFTEL). POWER, TRANSPORTATION AND THE MEDIA WERE WIDELY DISRUPTED AS WERE SOME GOVERNMENT SERVICES. HOWEVER, THE STRIKE CALL
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WAS NOT UNIVERSALLY HONORED AND, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, OFFICES, FACTORIES, AND SHOPS WERE KEPT OPEN. AS ON APRIL 28 (PARIS 12528), THE STRIKE'S IMPACT WAS MAGNIFIED BY THE DISRUPTION OF POWER AND TRANSPORTATION, AND THE COUNTRY WAS CRIPPLED. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT PARALYZED, AND PARIS WAS NOT THE DEAD CITY THAT HAD BEEN FORECAST.

3. THE HIGH POINT OF THE DAY IN PARIS WAS A HUGE MARCH FROM THE BASTILLE TO THE EAST STATION (THE CGT CLAIMS HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, AND WE ESTIMATE NO LESS THAN 60,000 DEMONSTRATORS) STAGED BY THE CGT-CFDT-FEN ALLIANCE. THIS PARADE WHICH WAS DOMINATED BY THE COMMUNIST-LED CGT, AND IN PARTICULAR BY ITS PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS, DWARFED BOTH THE APRIL 28 AND MAY DAY (PARIS 12857) MARCHES, AND BY EARLY AFTERNOON IT WAS APPARENT THAT ITS SIZE WAS TOO MUCH EVEN FOR THE CGT TO HANDLE. CROWDS OF DEMONSTRATORS GATHERED AT THE BASTILLE TO JOIN THE PARADE HAD TO WAIT UNDER THE HOT SUN FOR A BOTTLENECK TO BE RESOLVED SOMEWHERE FURTHER ALONG THE PARADE ROUTE; AND THE CONSUMPTION OF BEER BEGAN TO BE NOTICEABLE. THIS MAY HELP EXPLAIN THE BRIEF OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE AT THE EAST STATION AT THE END OF THE DAY'S MARCH. (STUDENTS OF APPLIED MARXIST ECONOMICS WILL BE INTERESTED TO LEARN THAT CGT CANTEEN WAGONS WERE SPOTTED AT INTERVALS ALONG THE LINE OF MARCH SELLING BEER AND SANDWICHES AT 2 FRANCS (\$0.40) EACH; BUT THAT THE UNION'S WAGONS AT BASTILLE, WHERE THE CROWDS WERE THICKEST, WERE SELLING THE SAME THINGS FOR 50 CENTIMES (TEN CENTS) MORE.)

4. FOLLOWING THE DEMONSTRATION, CGT GENERAL SECRETARY SEGUY AND HIS CFDT COUNTERPART MAIRE CALLED FOR A CONTINUATION OF THE KIND OF LABOR UNITY EVIDENCED BY THE STRIKE. IN A NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HOWEVER, MAIRE STATED, IN EFFECT, THAT THE FO'S LEADERSHIP HAD JOINED THE STRIKE ONLY BECAUSE OF THE RANK AND FILE'S PRESSURE AND THAT, THEREFORE, EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO KEEP UP THE GRASS ROOTS PRESSURE FOR LABOR UNITY. SEGUY, FOR HIS PART, AGAIN REPEATED HIS DEMAND FOR A TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE ON THE ECONOMY; AND THERE WERE HINTS OF SOME FURTHER ACTION BEFORE JULY UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES CHANGED. (IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE ABSENCE OF FEN'S GENERAL SECRETARY HENRY -- WHO IS IN THE US ON A LEADER GRANT -- HAS YET TO BE PUBLICLY EXPLAINED.)

5. THE PUSH FOR LABOR UNITY ONLY UNDERSCORES THE FACT THAT IT DOES NOT REALLY EXIST. THE FO AND THE OTHER UNIONS OUTSIDE THE CGT-CFDT-FEN ALLIANCE ARE FULLY AWARE THAT THE CGT IS AIMING FOR SOME KIND OF FORMAL LABOR LEAGUE WHICH IT CAN DOMINATE, AND ARE TRYING TO STAY CLEAR OF THE SNARES. IN THIS CONNECT-

ION, FO HELD ITS OWN SEPARATE DEMONSTRATION IN PARIS,
WHICH HELPED ACCOUNT FOR THE ABSENCE OF ANY FO

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PARTICIPATION IN THE MARCH. (DURING THAT MEETING
GENERAL SECRETARY BERGERON STATED THAT THE REASON
THE STRIKE WAS A SUCCESS WAS THE FO'S PARTICIPATION.)
IN THE PROVINCES, HOWEVER, A NUMBER OF FO AND OTHER
UNIONS REFUSED TO SEE ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEIR
STRIKE AND THAT OF THE CGT AND ITS FRIENDS AND
JOINED IN THE OTHERS' DEMONSTRATIONS.

6. FOR ITS PART, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS UNMOVED BY
THE DAY'S EVENTS, AND IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THERE WILL
BE ANY CHANGE IN ITS POLICIES SOON. THERE IS, HOW-
EVER, SOME DISQUIET OVER THE FACT THAT THE CFDT HAS
BEEN CANVASSING ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE FINANCE
MINISTRY TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ON HOW TAX COLLECTION
IS ADMINISTERED AND THAT THAT UNION OBTAINED AND
RELEASED IN ADVANCE OF THE AUTHORITIES THE OFFICIAL
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COST OF LIVING STATISTICS. (SEE SEPTTEL.)

7. IN ASSESSING THE OVERALL SOCIAL, AS OPPOSED TO THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DAY'S EVENTS, IT SHOULD BE KEPT VERY MUCH IN MIND THAT VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN THE WALKOUT, LIKE THAT OF APRIL 28, WAS LARGELY CONFINED TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR, WHERE JOBS ARE SECURE, AND WHERE IN THE CASE OF THE COMMUNIST MUNICIPALITIES, THERE IS EVEN PRESSURE TO PARTICIPATE. IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, THE STRIKE WAS NOT UNIVERSALLY OBSERVED AND IT WAS NOT, BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION, A "GENERAL" ONE.
GAMMON

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